



Charles Simonds

Three Peoples

Samanedizioni

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Their dwellings make a pattern on the earth as of a great tree laid flat, branching and forking according to their loves and hates, forming an ancestral record of life lived as an odyssey, its roots in a dark and distant past...

Occasionally one meets an old minstrel along the paths through the dwellings. People say that as a child he and his parents began a long journey back and that in his endless wanderings he had accumulated an almost total history of his people. He returned with the jumbled and rambling songs which form a blanket of memories from the threads of a growing, listless and venturesome people who have been many places, and did many things...

... an old woman who came back from her journey into the past with a vision: what everyone had believed to be a life following an endless line was really part of a great unperceived arc that would eventually meet itself. At that point everyone would join their ancestors in a great joyous dance...

— fragments of notes recovered from a traveler

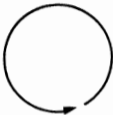
Their dwellings formed a road/house wandering over the earth on its way towards the future and away from the past. When \times moved from one dwelling to the next, they left everything behind untouched as a museum of personal effects. As dwelling followed dwelling, traces of a diminishingly distinct personal history remained. Traveling backwards was almost like stumbling into a room whose inhabitants had just left by another door. The farther the distance in time, the more this immediacy blurred; its distinctness dissolved into other moments. Time became continuous. Sand collected in the corners and roof beams fell in, until the earth reclaimed the architecture. Only a trace, an irregularity recalled that someone had once passed here on the way to somewhere else.

\times were preoccupied with cultivation and with decisions about the next direction the dwelling might take. Marital agreements, social ties, and economic concerns, the lay of the land, junctures — all these had to be thought about. Bureaucracies rarely developed because decisions were capricious.

Paths might intersect or pass near one another, but each dwelling retained its autonomy. Webs and thickets of old and new dwellings emerged creating strange cities that combined houses with ruins, gardens with parks that exposed personal histories to everyone's view. Inter-marriage was common when these joinings occurred; traditions and pasts were traded and lineages mixed.

Reminiscing about these gatherings \times saw them as the high points of their lives. Fortified with a feeling of here-we-all-are, \times moved on. Dense civilizations might occur and then disintegrate while \times parted and returned to their adventures. When someone wanting to trace their past came upon these intersections they might be unable to sort out the trails and, taking a chance would find themselves lost in a confusion of pasts. Occasionally someone who had ventured too far back would turn up on a doorstep — without a past or a present. These people were a source of much pity having risked all trying to penetrate what came before.

Tours into the past were organized. Teams of specialists — archaeologists, sociologists, anyone who might have a clue to the past — set out on expeditions. Periodically messengers returned with maps documenting some large meeting place of dwellings that had occurred long ago, and this discovery would be used to explain why certain families had maintained their beliefs, shared genetic traits, where feuds had originated. For most of the \times the past formed a tremendous net on which their lives traveled; or it was like a dark forest into which there were many paths. The past was a temptation and a threat, the begetter of insanities, the cause of endless ruminations and confusions — a mysterious world that might begin happily in the present on an afternoon stroll, but which stretched backwards into a terrifying miasma, a genealogical geography that disappeared over the hill and into the earth, beyond the horizon.




There is a warning tale — a troubling memory — repeated every year among ○ of a child who was born unhappily spinning toward the future instead of turning clockwise toward his past. For some time his confusion went unnoticed, and they merely thought he was dizzy and slow in learning to walk. But when he came of age, he joined in the re-birth and was caught in the whirling dance. Suddenly he was spun, wrenched and twisted out of the circle — dying horribly alone.

○ lives had two aspects: the first was the daily sorting out and keeping of time that placed events in space and history, merging past and present to make both histories and ongoing sagas as well as dwellings that changed according to the seasons; the second was the yearly concentration of birth and growth energy into one ritual at the winter solstice. The first historiographical aspect governed the daily task of reconstructing the new dwelling from the remains of the old. This effort was a recapitulation and re-working of personal memories into myth and history. The second ritual aspect, eschewing all temporal activity, re-enacted original creation in a dizzying celebration of sexual possibility.

The gathering took place in the dome — womb, at the center of the earth — dwelling universe that could be entered only by a ladder through the opening at the top. The cyclical dwellings were built around it in two concentric rings: the first, one storey high, containing the cooking and eating quarters, the second, usually two or three storeys high, the living quarters. A passageway between the inner and outer structures linked the two. Construction advanced the rings rotating them laterally around the dome. As portions of the structure were abandoned, they were sealed up, to deteriorate, and after one revolution was completed were dug up and rebuilt. Thus the remnants of each previous dwelling were excavated and remade. Life followed a circle.

The structure grew at least one unit a year. Completion of the new dwelling was timed to coincide with the winter solstice so that everyone's dwelling-place could be moved

forwards a unit toward the distant past and one away from the recent. Crops grown outside the dwelling were part of this circular pattern, planted in a rotation around a center. The dwelling functioned palpably as a personal and cosmological clock its encircling architecture operating as an elaborate sundial. The annuary poles over the entrance to the dome cast shadows on the surrounding walls in complex and changing patterns, marking the passage of time. Inside the dome a chant was maintained without interruptions. Its faint rhythm audibly kept time for those outside. Everyone took their turn. Chanting was meditation, a way of passing into a non-ordinal pulse, unrelated to the particular incidents of life.

The construction of the new dwelling took a year and followed a precise schedule so that the building progressed with the seasons. The continual sifting and sorting of the rubble formed a sort of uroborus in which the present devoured the past. Some things recovered were collected and reused; some were reminisced over and became artifacts of keepsakes. Stories and memories were woven around these mementos and the past was reconstituted in  minds just as the old bricks were fitted into the new dwelling.

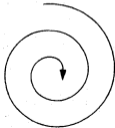
At times, this resurrection of the past was not achieved without some effort. Those who felt a need to wrestle with the memory of the person or event unearthed, stepped forward and re-lived it in the form of a story, a song or a speech, entering a dialogue between the living present and the dead. An entire day might be set aside to settle a particularly disturbing recollection. Once everyone was reassured the excavation and construction began with rhythmic singing, sifting, and sorting.

Sexual relations supposedly were confined to the re-birth ceremony. There were strong prohibitions against other sexual encounters, and transgressors, if caught, were executed. This repression was intended to channel all sexual energy towards one shared incestuous moment, although in fact it gave rise to heightened daily promiscuity. Surreptitious meetings took place through elaborate and oftimes humorous subterfuges. Lovemaking in a hidden corridor or through some inventive

masquerade of another activity was commonplace. Such behavior was ignored and thus tolerated, as long as it did not result in pregnancy. Self-administered abortions and prophylactic roots, although taboo, were common. Incestuous relations were the goal of such illicit encounters. Even then, they were only a burlesqued version of the imploding/exploding sexual activities of the annual re-birth, and introduced a note of obscene laughter and discord into an everyday life that was otherwise bland and routine. Although the result was supposed to be death, the risk was slight in actuality, and held the fascination of a sexual Russian roulette. Publicly, anyone of the ○ would say sexual activity for any purpose other than procreation was incomprehensible, that intercourse could take place only within the sacred confines of the dome, and then only on the solstice; that unless protected by the dome — womb no conception was possible.

The solstice was the focus of the ○ lives. As the day approached, excavation ceased and excitement spread throughout the dwellings. Foodstuffs were harvested and a share placed within the new house. At sunset every adult gathered according to age and descended into the dome. Each, upon reaching the bottom of the ladder, placed a log upon the fire at the center, removed and burned his or her clothes, and took up the chant. As the circle expanded the chant grew louder, the fire brighter and hotter. With the entrance of the last person, the ladder was drawn in crosswise above their heads.

Everyone stood hand in hand around the wall in a large circle. The dance of rotation began, whirling into eddies of energy. Mirroring the solar system couples formed and swung each other around the fire. The dance continued, faster and faster, until the fire began to die. Everyone spun, always trying to increase the other's speed. As the womb darkened, they moved toward the center, reeling to the floor. Lost in the void, they clutched for another body to find themselves in orgasm. When ○ were spent, fatigue having overtaken them, ○ returned to the daily counting and ordering of time, taking with them each other's potential.



⊙ believed in a world entirely created by their own wills, in which nature's realities were of little concern. Their dwelling formed an ascending spiral — with the past, constantly buried, serving as a building material for the future. They obsessively gambled with their resources, the number of inhabitants, the height of the structure. As the dwelling grew higher, it buried the cultivatable land. As it grew, less and less workers were needed for its construction.

⊙ aspired towards an ecstatic death. Their goal was to achieve both the greatest possible height and to predict the very moment of collapse, the moment when the last of their resources would be consumed and their death inevitable. They lived for that moment alone. After a collapse survivors would begin anew, tracing out a tremendous spiral on the earth's surface. At the periphery they built a house. The detritus of life gradually deposited in front of it providing the base for the next dwelling. As time passed a ramp was thrown up, the rate of incline planned to bring them to the highest possible point at the center of the spiral. As their predictive mechanisms became increasingly accurate and sophisticated there were constant readjustments, such calculations determined the infrastructure of ⊙ social system. Life was hierarchical. The uses of energies were determined by the ruling philosopher/ mathematicians. Division of labor, population control, food, size and disposition of labor and research forces, were all dictated by elaborate evaluative and self-corrective mechanisms.

⊙ were for the most part optimistic. Although the construction required hard work and sacrifice, they labored happily knowing that the mathematician's predictions were finer, their dwelling place higher, their lives nearer the climax. They believed resolutely that they were contributing to the most ambitious monument ever conceived by man. Their assurance was confirmed by badges of merit and honors given to the various work forces. Visitors from the spiral-cities compared progress with their own and were filled with immense pride at their accomplishments.

The monument relentlessly consumed all material goods. Pro-

perty had importance only as it related to the construction. Objects no longer useful were by law contributed to the pile of debris at the front of the dwelling. No personal possessions were allowed, no artifacts or keepsakes, no objects of art, no religious figures, no personal or communal decoration; life was merely a function of shelter and height. As the highest elevations were reached, and fewer and fewer laborers were needed to continue, large groups were sacrificed, jumping voluntarily from the forward edge of the structure in the central well giving their bodies to the task of pushing the edifice higher.

The past, in any personal sense, was dismissed and forgotten. The exception was the carefully kept records of previous structural decisions — abstracted and distilled into mathematical equations to be used in projecting the building. The dwelling's past was reconstructed by a mathematical model to be used in dynamic relationship to its future. These records were kept with compulsive accuracy, because the slightest error might mean the failure of the entire edifice. Failure was, in fact, inevitable so that the work process itself was punctuated by pangs of doubt that led to depression, and finally to extinction.

